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The Contradictions of National Space: Contested Legality and Citizenship Practices in Post-Partition Northeast In

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The shadow of the Partition of 1947 looms large on the contemporary life of Northeast India in one distinctive way. On the one hand, the new international border dividing India and East Pakistan/Bangladesh is seen as inviolable. On the other hand, the partition could not change the position that the region acquired in colonial times as a frontier. The flow of people from one of the subcontinent's most densely populated areas, to a relatively sparsely populated region open to new settlements, could not suddenly be turned off.

The border remains extremely porous till this day, and there is an extensive blurring between citizens and non-citizens. Viewed through the lenses of actual practice of citizenship, rather than legal fictions, what we have in many parts of Northeast India arguably, is a flexible citizenship regime - a flexible approach to voting where people can vote despite indeterminate citizenship status. Focusing on Assam, Dr Baruah examined the politics of how this regime has come about. While the discourse of illegal immigration dominates headlines, given the routines of illicit trans-border activity, the political aesthetics of everydayness has framed competing perceptions.

Despite obvious tensions in this regime, Dr Baruah pointed to the reality of an actually existing transnational space that the trope of inviolable borders cannot handle. The region's future political stability in the long run, he argued, will depend on an ability to develop institutions and practices that are in line with this reality, rather than policies that seek to unilaterally enforce border control.

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